

Telluride comes of age

Tucked-away town gains star status

By KATHRYN STRAACH
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TELLURIDE, Colo. — If Butch Cassidy were to return today to Telluride, site of his first bank robbery, he just might bypass the money-lending institution. After all, in its tucked-away Telluride is the midway where Hollywood stars with silver-lined pockets have been entreating in recent years. But don't tell anyone. Town officials don't like to discuss their famous residents.

"We prefer not to give out that information," says Barb Loken, communications manager for the Telluride Chamber Resort Association. "We don't want to exploit them. Some have kids going to school here."

But just take a ride up Chair Lift 100 and you'll hear people abuzz, pointing out Oprah Winfrey's and Sylvester Stallone's opulent log and stone mountain chalets. Back in town, Tom Cruise is building his retreat.

And this is the place where model Christie Brinkley crashed a few days before Easter in a heli-skiing accident, narrowly escaping serious injury. She is reported to be hanging out here these days after phisville from songster Billy Joel.

Even the Coors mountain

Even one of the majestic snowcapped mountains serving as backdrop — Wilson Peak — has star status: It's the mountain used in Coors beer commercials.

And Telluride itself became high profile last winter by starring in a Visa credit-card commercial. The company's pitch: At the Telluride Ski Resort, they let you take the Plunge (a spine-tingling vertical drop not recommended unless you really know what you're doing), but they won't take American Express. American Express then sued Visa because American Express says it's accepted in the town of Telluride — just not on the mountain.

Plenty of pulp material for such a tiny town. Even though this is a remote area — the closest traffic light is 65 miles away (as pointed out in the Visa commercial), the town is a happening place, attracting both high-profile figures and those dedicating their lives — at least for now — to skiing. Locals are serious skiers, often with eye-catching hair. (How do those guys with Mohawks keep their ears warm?)

New Aspen?

Some claim it is the new Aspen, comparing it to Aspen from the 1960s: a small, challenging ski



Telluride, Colo., is gaining a reputation as a winter and summer resort for the rich and famous.

Among its residents: Oprah Winfrey, Sylvester Stallone, Tom Cruise and Christie Brinkley.

resort with a nonpretentious, laid-back attitude. Loken, an Aspen resident in the '60s, agrees there are some similarities, but Telluride has its own identity, its own history. "We're a lot more isolated," Loken says. "A big mountain range, the Rockies, separates us (from the other resorts). Aspen is plopped right in the middle of everything. There aren't any four-lane highways leading to Telluride. You have to really want to get here."

This is true. Telluride is in southwest Colorado on Colorado Highway 145 in San Miguel County, nestled in a granite box canyon along the San Miguel River. It's 67 miles south of Montrose, 127 miles southeast of Grand Junction, 125 miles north of Durango and 335 miles southwest of Denver.

Telluride, which has a National Historic Landmark designation, has seen both boom and bust over the years. It was settled in the 1870s as a gold- and silver-mining camp, incorporated as a town in 1878, and was notorious for its gambling and red-light district. Some say it was named for tellurium, a gold-bearing ore. Others say it means "To hell you ride."

Rediscovered in '60s

Around the turn of the century, more than 5,000 people called Telluride home, but the population diminished along with the price of gold, silver and other mining byproducts. Streets were bare for nearly four decades until the area was rediscovered in late 1960s for its recreation and real estate. Telluride's first ski run opened in 1972, marking another beginning for the area.

Now Telluride is known as ski-bum heaven, with an uphill capacity of 10,000 skiers per hour, more than 1,000 acres of skiable terrain, an average snowfall of 300 inches — and no lift lines. That's no hype.

As you ascend the mountain, you can see run after run absolutely skier-free. And word was, the resort

considered itself busy that week.

But Telluride stays consistently busy, yet low-key, the year around. It attracts as many people in the summer as in the winter, and it dubs itself the Festival Capital of Colorado — with good reason. From mid-May to the end of September, the town hosts a festival each weekend — except one. Truth is, the only reason that scheduled for a festival is that the town just wanted a weekend off.

As if there isn't enough to do already with standard summertime fun, including hiking, mountain biking, golf, four-wheeling, horseback riding, fishing, river rafting, backpacking and camping. Room rates in the summer are always lower, and with Telluride's Super Summer Savings package, travelers can get an additional 15-percent discount.

Accommodations are toughest to find during one town's two biggest festivals: the Bluegrass Festival in June and the Film Festival on Labor Day weekend.

Costly lift tickets

If you're planning ahead for next ski season, don't be scared off by Telluride's reputation as an expert-only mountain. True, the front face is a scary sight for beginner and intermediate skiers, but the back of the mountain is wide-open nirvana for those with no death wish.

Only 32 percent of the mountain is advanced, 47 percent is intermediate, 21 percent beginner.

You also might be scared off by Telluride's pricey lift tickets (\$43 a day in '94-'95), but remember, you won't be wasting time in lift lines.

Also, there are ways to whittle down that price, such as buying multi-day tickets, going at the right times or staying in the right places.

With all the current hype, Telluride appears to be experiencing another boom, but it likes retaining its small-town, no-stop-light image. Its permanent population is 1,300 — only 200

more people than 10 years ago. "We only have 3,900 pillows in town and in the mountain village," says Loken, pointing out there are no major projects planned. "We probably could use more hotel rooms."

Although construction in town apparent, it's happening on previously occupied spots. The boundaries of both the town and the mountain-village resort already have been established. Loken says so the town is not expanding.

Most of the growth is in the mountain-village resort, five miles from Telluride. The mid-mountain community with a European feel was established in 1987. (This is where many of the stars are building.) The majority of accommodations here are ski-in/ski-out, in the village core near lifts Three and Four. The area includes an ice-skating rink, ski school, nursery and day care, tennis courts and an 18-hole championship golf course.

Access to the mountain-village resort will be made easier when a gondola, previously scheduled to open this summer, is completed. Environmental concerns have put the \$9 million gondola/mass-transit system on hold.

The town is currently in the middle of a wetlands fight with the Environmental Protection Agency, says Tom Fulton, vice president for resort services for Telluride Ski and Golf. If and when the go-ahead is given, it will take 18 months to complete. Telluride is confident the problems will be resolved.

In the meantime, the gondola is being promoted for its environmental goodwill: a free transportation system offering Telluride guests and residents an alternative to driving.

A gondola would make travel a little easier between town and mid-mountain. But gondola or not, folks who venture to this southwestern Colorado haven will find a means to have fun.

For more details on Telluride, call (800) 525-3455.

Oshkosh abuzz with exotic airplanes

When there were still more subscriptions available, Salt Lake City agreed to pay the additional amount. In later years, when every little company and city in the area was begging for more Deer Creek water, Salt Lake City was blamed for taking the surplus.

The cost of building the reservoir increased steadily because of delays and inflation. Even though the final cost was more than three times the original estimate—\$24,000,000 or \$240 an acre-foot, Deer Creek Reservoir is still the cheapest and surest water supply in the area.

The completion of the Deer Creek Reservoir fulfilled a prophecy of Brigham Young as recorded in the diary of Ben H. Bullock:

Some day an earthen dam will be constructed in Provo Canyon across the Provo River making a large reservoir, and water will be take from this reservoir around the foothills of this valley into Salt Lake Valley and the people of Salt Lake City will get much of their supply of water from this source.

MUNICIPAL WELLS

Orem City now has six wells which pump water into two 3,000,000-gallon tanks on a hill at the base of Timpanogos. A higher tank stores 2,000,000 gallons of



MUNICIPAL WELL, 1946: Jim Blair and Willard Pierce. Courtesy Mrs. Willard Pierce.

pure water from canyon springs. All water flows into the city water system through 134 miles of pipe to 40,000 people. During the month of July 1976, Orem residents and industries used 465,540,000 gallons of water or 11,389 gallons per person. Orem City leaders plan to fill the water needs of future citizens with one-third of the supply coming from wells, one-third from springs, and one-third from storage.

No wells may now be dug without the permission of the State Engineer. This regulation is to protect current well owners whose supplies might dry up if too many taps are made on the same underground stream. For this reason, Orem City wells go below the water-bearing strata that supplies adjacent cities; the wells are between five hundred and one thousand feet deep. Today's wells are very different from those dug by Alf Skinner. They are located by a geologist instead of a water witch, and a drill does the digging and lays the pipe.

Orem City now buys all the irrigation water of good title that is for sale within its boundaries. It becomes part of the culinary supply as soon as it is purified. Until then, it is rented out by the city to pay for various costs incurred.

LITIGATION

In 1851, cities had been given control of irrigation water in their charters. From then on Provo City exercised full control over the Provo River from the mouth of the canyon to the lake. Provo City often questioned means of measurement and apportionment between interests. In 1882, Provo City sued one of its own citizens, Newel Knight, a superintendent of the Provo Bench Canal and Irrigation Company for taking and using water from the Provo River without the authority of the water master. Since the Provo Bench Canal and Irrigation Company Trustees had directed Mr. Knight to take the water, they authorized him to get legal help. The Provo Bench Canal and Irrigation Company won the case.

Before 1880, water was appurtenant to land and was the property of the Territory of Utah. The Territorial legislature of 1880 changed this by making water personal property that could be bought and sold. Irrigation districts were reorganized as water stock companies where water could be used for speculation or any other reason. The State could not intervene to protect public rights or to protest excessive grants. Judges knew very little about irrigation matters, so when cases were brought before them in court, they frequently granted more water than was available. As a result, streams were over-appropriated which eventually rendered some water rights worthless.

In 1884, a convention of all Provo River interests was called at Heber City to consider better management of water distribution. A tentative agreement was reached, but it proved unsatisfactory. In 1894, Provo City filed suits against various canal companies that were never brought to trial.

In 1901, legislative change was made in an effort to define rights. The State was divided into divisions, each headed by a superintendent who had been

appointed by the State Engineer. The law required records of all rights to be kept. It allowed existing rights to continue if they were being used beneficially. Now rights could be acquired by appropriation. Certain rules were applied to rights that could be apportioned. One rule was that rights were to be measured by a fractional part of the whole supply.

By 1902, Telluride Power Company had acquired power water rights and the Nunn brothers had built a plant on the Provo River about two miles up the canyon to create a market for power. They later built the Olmstead plant at the mouth of the canyon. The Provo Bench Canal and Irrigation Company trustees favored the plant and made agreements that protected their rights and secured certain benefits.

In the fall of 1913, the Provo Bench Canal and Irrigation Company hired a young civil engineer and stockholder, Frank Wentz, to conduct hydrographic studies of the land serviced by the company. Not long thereafter he was made commissioner over the Provo River system. Mr. Wentz remained Provo River Commissioner until his death in 1958.

Perhaps the most difficult time of Mr. Wentz's service was before the Deer Creek Reservoir supplemented and evened out yearly water supplies so that no crops were lost to drought. He was often confronted by desperate farmers who

begged for a little more water to save a crop or an orchard. His reply always left the decision to the petitioner: "I'd like to turn the water to you, but first, tell me, which of your neighbors do you want me to take it from?"

The Provo Bench Canal still provides water to farmers. Other canal companies also serve the benchland. Canal and laterals are lined tightly so that water, work, and expense are saved. Water is also saved by better turnout devices. New metal and concrete gates and weirs allow accurate measurements, and a daily record can be maintained. The flow of a stream several hundred miles away can be known by dialing a certain telephone number and listening to a recording device installed at a measuring point. One hundred fourteen years have passed since the first irrigation canal was completed and irrigation is now a technical science.

Orem's leaders have always understood and planned for future water needs. Because of this, Orem City is in a most favorable position with ample water for future growth. In 1976, Orem City Engineer, Russell Brown, reports that Orem owns all of Heisel Springs, has the use of Alta Springs, owns stock in the Provo Bench Canal and Irrigation Company and also the Provo Reservoir Water Users Company, and owns several culinary wells. — p 24